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ABSTRACT

The rendering of the concept of rationality is crucial to the understanding of the implications of including mental health as an educational goal. If there is a positive, universal definition of rationality, which can be applied to everyday situations, then the teaching of rationality and thereby the improvement of mental health should be undertaken in the school. Those who assume this universal definition advocate inclusion of mental health as an educational aim; those in doubt about the universality of rationality criteria oppose the use of mental health concepts in school. Two distinct bodies of literature exist which bear on the question of this universality. A possible conclusion is that if there are no early applicable criteria of rationality, education for mental health reduces to education for conformity. (KA)

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MENTAL HEALTH AS A GOAL OF EDUCATION

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In this paper I shall assume that rationality is central to the concept of mental health. I shall then examine some of the difficulties encountered when one attempts to discover universal criteria of rationality. Then I shall examine the effects of these difficulties upon the heuristic value of the concept of mental health, and finally, with all of this as background, I shall address the question of the inclusion of mental health as an educational goal.

Many writers have recommended "mental health", variously defined, as an educational goal.[1] This tendency, however, has been rejected by a number of writers recently.[2]

It is my contention that it is the rendering of the concept of rationality which is crucial to the understanding of the implications of including mental health as an educational goal. Specifically, if one holds that there is a positive, universal definition of rationality, which can be readily applied to everyday situations, then it seems incontrovertible that the teaching of rationality and thereby the improvement of mental health should be undertaken in the school.

The argument would sound like this: If mental health is universally definable, it is as obviously desirable as is physical

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health. The question still remains, however, as to why mental health should be a goal of the school. The answer here seems to lie purely in the close relationship between mental health and rationality. In addition, it can also be argued that schools do concern themselves with the health of students. Schools employ dentists, administer eye check-ups, and the like. Even the government lunch program might be seen as an effort to improve the health of students. So why not mental health? All of this seems to follow if mental health can be clearly defined through the concept of rationality.

If, however, there are no universal criteria of rationality, then it seems that mental illness as a concept is in danger of collapse. Indeed, this is the position of Thomas Szasz, among others.[3] I would like to assert that even if there are possible criteria for rationality, but they turn out to be difficult to sort out, and especially difficult in borderline situations, (the ones likely to be encountered in the school), then one should view with caution any expansion of the concept of mental illness into non-obvious contexts.[4]

Further, it seems that those who support mental health as an educational goal are arguing or assuming that there exists a universal and applicable positive attribute called mental health which is closely related to rationality. In contrast those who oppose the use of mental health concepts in education seem to be doing so, at least in part, either upon their doubts concerning the universality of rationality criteria, or their doubts concerning the applicability of these criteria in the educational context.

The former position is taken by many "humanistic" psychologists and educators who see the achievement of things like "self-actualization" or "non-defensiveness" or "authenticity" as characteristics toward which everyone in any society would be well-advised to strive.[5] These levels of functioning are assumed to be "good", and "healthy", and it is likely that a writer, such as Abraham Maslow, would have thought it strange indeed if anyone suggested that being at the level of self-actualization is not somehow "healthier" than being "stuck" at the level of safety needs.

Similarly, many writers argue from a psychoanalytic perspective that self-knowledge and insight into one's own unconscious are worthy ideals to be encouraged in any society.[6] There is an assumption among such writers that there is a universal (Freudian) standard of mental health.

This assumption of a universally valid definition of mental health is a prominent characteristic of J. Wilson's argument for the inclusion of mental health as an educational aim. In discussing the difficulty of defining mental health, Wilson asserts that:

> The difficulties experienced by psychologists and others in reaching agreement about an adequate definition (of mental illness) are partly caused by...a tendency to lapse into a culture-bound or relativistic position, whereby what is mentally healthy is taken to be what is accepted as mentally healthy in a particular social group: a position which is logically incoherent.[7]

This quote makes apparent Wilson's position that there is a universal standard of mental health. Wilson's concept of mental health is closely related to the philosophical concept of rationality.

Kathryn Morgan, in arguing against Wilson's position, states that

> The underlying assumption of this approach is that there exist independently assessable criteria for what constitute rational methods of justification, "methods of reason". But surely, this assumption is questionable.[8]

Before discussing the issues of the universality and applicability of criteria of rationality, I shall now briefly address the issue of the relationship between the concept of rationality and the concept of mental illness. That the concept of rationality is central to the concept of mental illness seems intuitively correct. Being mentally ill, however, seems to apply only when one is being irrational in certain kinds of ways. Dancing on a tabletop in public while under the influence of alcohol, or tearing down a football goalpost while caught up in the mood of the moment, might be considered irrational acts, but are probably not in themselves the kinds of things we mean by mental illness. If, however, the table-dancing or goalpost-razing seem to be caused by some kind of "internal condition", then the irrationality would likely be seen as the result of mental illness. The mentally ill, then, are seen as being irrational as a result of mental illness which is then a kind of causal explanation of

their behavior. While it is true that this rendering of what is going on among the mentally ill is not without its challengers, it is clearly the dominant conceptual view. Mental illness is irrationality of a certain sort with a certain causal history. It follows that one's view of rationality will have profound effects upon one's view of mental illness and health.

In what follows, then, I shall examine two distinct bodies of literature which bear upon the question of there being possible universal criteria of rationality.

The question being raised here parallels a central issue in much of contemporary philosophy of science. The questions addressed in this body of literature involve questions like, "How do we gain scientific knowledge?"; "How can we decide upon the truth of a proposition?"; "What is it rational to believe?".

At one time, these problems apparently seemed simple.[9] "For centuries knowledge meant, proven knowledge --- proven either by the power of the intellect or by the evidence of the senses."[10] This position in its many forms has been called justificationism, or the justificationist position. It demanded the acceptance of only that which was proven and the rejection of everything else. This position enabled people to clearly distinguish between rationality and irrationality by an appeal to the production of proof. This is epistemological utopia, but, of course, has been discredited. A good bit of this rejection rests upon the "logical impossibility of establishing an empirical basis and an inductive logic"... "Facts cannot prove proposition." Nothing can be proven with certainty. The next step in the development

of epistemology is noe-justificationism, which demanded the specification of the "probability of any hypothesis in the light of available empirical evidence". But, Popper has apparently shown[11] that no hypothesis has any more or less probability than any other. Therefore, there is no criteria for accepting one hypothesis and rejecting another under this framework. A third way of conceptualizing scientific rationality may be called "naive falsificationism". According to this view, a scientific or potentially true statement must be stated in such a way that it can be shown to be false on empirical evidence. It must be stated so that the evidence which will enable it to be rejected is clearly feasible; in other words, it must be vulnerable to empirical disproof.

One can see here a progression from the "good old days" when everybody "knew" what knowledge was and how to judge it true or false, rational or irrational, through a series of philosophical-historical events which have "worn away" at this certainty until it is now widely accepted that we do not judge propositions to be true or false, rational or irrational; nor do we judge them to be true until falsified, or more or less probably true. Instead, we simply observe how many facts (and what kind of facts) or how much data is generated from a particular theoretical structure. We simply see how "valuable" the propositions turn out to be in comparison to other propositions derived from competing theories relative to some general set of problems. Lakatos calls this methodological falsificationism. It may be that our only choice is between some brand of methodological falsificationism on the one hand and irrationalism on the other.

I would like to sketch the Kakatos view of rationality as it might be useful in the articulation of the place of the concept of rationality in the understanding of the concept of mental illness. Lakatos follows a hypothetical-deductive tradition of science, (with, of course, many qualifications). That is, following Popper, one makes broad, bold conjectures of theories about the world. Then, one goes about deducing testable predictions or hypotheses from these theories, and then one goes about "checking" with the real world to see if these decuctions are borne out. Lakatos, unlike Popper however, does not assume that if the prediction is shown to be false, one is compelled to give up the theory. Instead, Lakatos asserts that it is perfectly rational to hold on to such a theory under certain circumstances. These certain circumstances involve (1) whether or not there is a better theory around, and (2) whether or not in spite of this counter-evidence, the theory generates other productive, new, non-refuted predictions. In this model, progress is taking place in the context of a research program which is characterized by a "hard core" and a number of "auxilliary hypotheses". The hard core is "methodologically protected" from attack. It is "assumed", and if counter-evidence appears in the form of rejected propositions, the auxilliary hypotheses through which the propositions were generated from the hard core, are modified. These auxilliary hypotheses, then, form a "protective belt" around the core.

This process is seen as a "consistently progressive theoretical shift", as long as the process is generating new verified

facts, and not just protecting the "hard core" through "ad hoc hypotheses, mere linguistic devices".

This method for judging the rationality of a belief system is a gallant attempt to avoid slipping into the irrationalism of a relativistic position. It is, however, very difficult to see how this kind of approach could be used to determine the rationality or irrationality of a particular belief system in real life. For instance, could this type of analysis demonstrate a clearly delusional person as being irrational?

Consider the story of a woman who was persuaded by her family to see a psychiatrist.[12] Upon entering the psychiatrist's office she was asked why she was there. She responded that her family thought it was strange that she said she was dead. The psychiatrist asked, "Are you dead?" and she said "Yes", whereupon the psychiatrist thought that he would dissuade her from this delusion in the following manner. He asked her, "Do dead people bleed?" She answered, "No." He pulled out a pin, pricked her finger and squeezed out a drop of blood, and asked, "Well, what do you think of that?" Her answer was, "Well, then dead people do bleed".

Let us attempt a Lakatos-type analysis of this woman's belief system. First, she has come up with a theory: "I am dead". The next step would be to deduce some predictions. Let's say she's deduced the following: (1) Therefore, I don't feel. (2) I don't laugh (3) I don't cry. (4) I don't make love (5) I don't eat. (6) I don't drink. And, let us further say that all of these predictions turn out to be true. Then the psychiatrist comes along and says, "Do dead people bleed?". She answers, "No"; i.e. her prediction is that she will not bleed. She

turns out, however, to be incorrect. Does that mean she "has to" reject her theory? Lakatos would certainly say no. The theory that she is dead has adequately predicted a number of pieces of data. Now it has failed to predict one piece of data correctly. Should she give up her"hard core"? Is that the only rational thing to do? Hardly. Her simple answer was, "Dead people do bleed", but a sophisticated auxilliary hypothesis might allow her to maintain that although most dead people don't bleed, she does, because a small pump has been surgically placed in her chest. This pump keeps her blood moving, so while she is indeed dead, she bleeds.

The physician could then propose an X-ray of her chest to falsify her assertion. Let's assume that no pump is seen on the X-ray. Must she now reject her theory? Certainly not. First, she could dispute the reliability of the procedure of X-Rays. She certainly has a "rational right" to question the assumption upon which the lack of a shadow on a piece of film "proves" that there is no pump in her chest. If, somehow, the theories of X-raying proved adequate, she could then claim that the pump was constructed out of X-ray transparent material. The process of successive adaptations could go on for quite a time without it being irrational. Lakatos points out that each adaptation need not produce immediate positive results. Of Newton's gravitational theory, he reports:

> When it was first produced, it was submerged in an ocean of anomalies" (or if you wish "counterexamples"), and opposed by the observational theories supporting these anomalies. But Newtonians turned, with brilliant tenacity and ingenuity, one counter-instance after another into corroborating instances...[13]

It would seem, then, that holding on to one's belief system in the face of counterevidence is not even bad science, much less irrationality or mental illness. While it is probably true that the "dead" woman's "research programme" will become ad hoc, vacuous, and will fail to anticipate novel data, this is not obviously so from the outset. It is not as easy to categorize her theory as irrational as one might think.

The general philosophical problem here seems to be that the "older" criteria for judging this woman "wrong" also ends up judging as "wrong" some of the best scientific efforts in history, and those models which do end up approving of these scientific enterprises, also end up running the danger of approving of this woman's theory of her own deadness, (i.e. calling it rational).

Some writers in the field, including Kuhn[14], seem to have concluded that it is impossible to find universal criteria of rationality, that the truth value of a belief can only be determined within a specific conceptual framework.

It is my position that Lakatos and others have given us some idea of what scientific rationality looks like, and perhaps also, what the criteria for a universal definition of rationality might look like. The problem of application, however, still remains.

A second body of literature appears to bear upon our problem. The question of judging a belief system as rational has been extensively addressed by philosophers of the social sciences interested in the different beliefs held by members of different cultures.[15] How is it that one understands the beliefs and behaviors of "alien cultures", i.e. cultures which differ significantly from our own?

Luke defends the position that there are indeed universal criteria for judging the rationality of a cultural belief system. The criteria which he suggests are such things as the conceptions of negation, identity, and non-contradiction. As Luke states, "If for example they (an alien culture) were unable to see the truth of P excludes the truth of its denial, how could they ever communicate truths to one another and reason from them to other truths.[16]

On the other hand, many of other writers would agree with Winch[17] who argues that alien cultural beliefs and rituals constitute "a coherent universe of discourse", and that this universe is a conception of reality which can be ciphered and which is rational in its own right. Reddiford states it in more detail when he says:

> If I do not share a common way of life with those who make religious or magico-religious assertions then I cannot see the point of making such assertions, though I may know the rules involved in making them, And if I do not see why they have a special regard for their own reasons in making such assertions then it is irrational of me to assert that they are true. But if I do not see that there is a point in such an assertion, and come to believe that there are reasons for asserting it, then it is rational for me to assert that it is true, i.e. to believe it, whether or not it is, as a matter of fact, true.[18]

We are again confronted with a challenge to the notion of a universal definition of rationality. While I agree with those who would reject the irrationalism of a relativistic position, I would claim that the seductiveness of such a position bears witness to the

tremendous difficulties encountered when one attempts to proceed from a conceptual rendering of criteria for rationality to an operational application of these criteria to the specific beliefs held by real people.

Under these circumstances, what are the consequences of the adoption of mental health as an educational goal? It seems probable that in lieu of clearly applicable criteria of rationality, education for mental health reduces to education for conformity. This claim is in need of explication. How vulnerable to cultural bias is psychiatric diagnosis?

In December 1973, a committee of the American Psychiatric Association, by a vote of 13 to 0 with 2 abstentions, removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders. Also, recently, several forms of "drug abuse" have come to be considered "pathological". The point is that what is considered mental illness is, in borderline cases at least, indeed frequently a matter of cultural consensus.

Under these circumstances, teaching for "mental health" reduces to the inculcation in students those values and beliefs which are consistent with our cultural "world view". This seems probably not to be what mental health advocates have in mind, but it does seem to be what educators are, at least in part, already up to.

Introducing mental health language, however, does inject a new twist. Teaching society's values is one thing. Going about "curing" students of "mental illness" is another. Or, putting the issue differently, if simple conformity is seen as mental health, then, the mentality of medicine, with its emphasis upon treatment, curing, and other manipulative techniques appropriate to dealing with pathology, will be brought to bear in the educational context in which students

had hopefully heretofore been dealt with as free agents to be persuaded, perhaps, but not "treated" into believing the"right" things.

"Mental health talk", then, has rather heavy-handed normative implications. Further it tends to reduce the sphere of freedom and moral responsibility based upon the rational process of decision-making, and replace it with notions of manipulation.

Education is already admittedly a normative endeavor. Invoking the language of "health", however, tends to obscure the normative nature of the enterprise, while the introduction of the "treatment mentality" tends to change the rules of the game. The result may turn out to be a form of indoctrination.[19]

FOOTNOTES

[1]This tendency can be traced back at least as far as the Progressive Movement. See Cremin, L.A. The Transformation of the School (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), especially pages 208-215. For a more specific history, see Burnham, J.C., "Psychiatry, Psychology, and the Progressive Movement," American Quarterly 12 (1960): 457-465.

[2]See especially:
R.S. Peters,"'Mental Health' as an Educational Aim", in Readings in the Philosophy of Education: A Study of Curriculum, ed.

J. R. Martin (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1970), and K. Morgan, "Rationality, Madness and Pedagogical Witchcraft: The Dangers of'Mental Health' as an Aim of Education". Philosophy of Education Proceedings, (1974): 175-192.

[3]For a review of the positions of various "radical therapists", see:

H. M. Ruitenbeek, "'Radical Therapy' What is it all About?", in Going Crazy, ed. H.M. Ruitenbeek (New York: Bantam Books, 1972).

[4]For an excellent defense of the concept of mental illness within psychiatry, see:

M.S. Moore, "Some Myths About 'Mental Illness'", Inquiry 18 (1975): 233-65.

[5]A classic example is found in:

A. H. Maslow, Motivation and Personality 2nd edition, (Harper and Row) 1970.

[6]L.S. Kubie, "The Forgotten Man of Education", in The Healthy Personality, ed. H. M. Chiang and A. H. Maslow (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969).

[7]J. Wilson, "'Mental Health' as an Aim of Education", in Education and the Development of Reason, ed. R. F. Dearden, P. H. Hirst, and R.S. Peters, page 85.

[8]K. Morgan, "Rationality", Page 182.

[9]The review of the history of the philosophy which follows is largely a condensation of an excellent review by Irme Lakatos. Lakatos, I. "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes", in Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge. ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, (Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[10]Ibid., p. 91.

[11]For more details on this question see:

I. Lakatos, "Changes in the Problem of Inductive Logic", in The Problem of Inductive Logic, ed. I. Lakatos (Cambridge Press, 1968) pp. 315-317.

[12]This little vignette is taken in slightly modified form from T.F. Green, The Activities of Teaching (McGraw-Hill, 1971).

[13]I. Lakatos, Criticism, page 133.

[14]See T. S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[15]Collection of many discussions on this issue may be found in Rationality, ed. B.R. Wilson, (Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1970).

[16]S. Lukes, "Some Problems about Rationality" in Wilson, Rationality, pp. 209-210.

[17]P. Winch. The Idea of a Social Science. (New York: Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1960).

[18]G. Reddiford, "Rationality and Understanding". Philosophy 50 (1975): 27.

[19]For an extensive analysis of the issues raised in this paper see V.P. Garlock Rationality, Mental Health and Education Doctoral Dissertation Cornell University 1977.